

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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R 311515Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9159
INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB PINS PINT ZA
SUBJ: RAILWAY STRIKE SPREADS

REF: LUSAKA 3061

1. RAILWAY WORKERS STRIKE WHICH BEGAN IN THE COPPERBELT AUGUST 29 (REFTEL) HAS NOW SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE LINE-OF-RAIL WITH APPROXIMATELY 8300 EMPLOYEES OFF THE JOB. ASIDE FROM A SEVERELY CURTAILED PASSENGER SERVICE BEING OPERATED BY SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL, THE STRIKE HAS HALTED ALL TRAIN SERVICE IN THE COUNTRY. ZAMBIA CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS (ZCTU) GENERAL SECRETARY NEWSTEAD ZIMBA AND RAILWAYS GENERAL MANAGER ANDERSON MAZOKA HAVE ISSUED A PLEA TO STRIKERS TO GO BACK TO WORK "IN THE INTERESTS OF THE NATION, THE PASSENGERS, AND THEMSELVES." ZAMBIA RAILWAYS AMALGAMATED WORKERS UNION (ZRAWU) OFFICIALS HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT THE STRIKE IS ILLEGAL, AND WAS ORGANIZED COMPLETELY BY THE WORKERS THEMSELVES WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OR APPROVAL OF THE UNION.

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2. THE STATEMENTS OF ZIMBA AND MAZOKA DISPLAYED A DIFFERING APPRECIATION OF THE CAUSES OF THE STRIKE. THE RAILWAYS GENERAL MANAGER TOLD THE PRESS THAT "SOME ELEMENTS" WERE BEHIND THE STRIKE FOR THEIR OWN ENDS. THE ZCTU LEADER, HOWEVER, SAID THAT ANY IMPLICATION THAT THE STRIKE WAS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED WAS INCORRECT.

ZIMBA DENIED THAT THE STRIKE HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH UPCOMING NATIONAL ELECTIONS, BUT THEY WERE DUE TO WORKER FRUSTRATION OVER INORDINATE DELAYS IN IMPLEMENTING COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS. LAYING THE BLAME DIRECTLY ON AN INEFFICIENT SYSTEM AT THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COURT (WHICH MUST APPROVE LABOR-MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS), ZIMBA SIAD HE FEARED INDUSTRIAL CHAOS UNLESS THE SYSTEM WAS OVERHAULED.

3. THE MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL SERVICES HAS BLAMED THE RAILWAYS MANAGEMENT AND ZRAWU FOR THE DELAY IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WAGES AGREEMENT. WHILE OFFICIALS OF BOTH THE FORMER ORGANIZATIONS STATED YESTERDAY THAT THE AGREEMENT WAS AWAITING APPROVAL FROM THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS COURT AND THE GOVERNMENT, A MINISTRY SPOKESMAN SAID THE MARCH AGREEMENT HAD BEEN "THROWN BACK" TO THE UNION AND MANAGEMENT FOR "RECTIFICATION SOME TIME BACK." THE SPOKESMAN SAID THE MINISTRY HAD NOT RECEIVED "FRESH DETAILS" ON THE AGREEMENT AND IT WAS UP TO THE PARTIES CONCERNED TO MAKE CORRECTIONS IN LINE WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY ON WAGES.

4. COMMENT: WITH THE MAIN PARTIES CONCERNED BLAMING EACH OTHER FOR THE DELAY WHICH PRECIPITATED THE STRIKE, THE MEETINGS NOW GOING ON BETWEEN OFFICIALS OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ORGANIZATIONS ARE BOUND TO BE DIFFICULT. EVEN WITH THIS TYPE OF SQUABBLING ASIDE, HOWEVER, IT WILL BE NO EASY TASK TO COME UP WITH A SOLUTION WHICH WILL MEET WORKERS' CONCERN WHILE CONFORMING WITH THE IMF-IMPOSED CEILING ON SALARY INCREASES.
CLINGERMAN

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